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ABSTRACT

The issue of leadership is addressed as it applies to Canadian universities and their role in advancing Canada's economic development, international competitiveness, social justice and the quality of life, both at home and abroad. How the university system in Canada has answered this leadership role is detailed through the listing of successes and efforts in such areas as improvements in enrollment figures, university responses to societal needs for education, new approaches to maximizing their resources, and how Canadian universities are responding to the needs of the marketplace in their curriculum development and research efforts. Further discussion is presented on how Canadian universities are usually at the forefront of finding solutions to many contemporary problems in society and business including the environment, physical fitness, disarmament, and employee/management relations. Benefits that a community gains by having a university within its boundaries, such as: cultural programming, sporting events, libraries, clinics, and support of the local economy are described. (GLR)

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UNIVERSITIES IN THE REAL WORLD

By

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Presented to the Canadian Club of Vancouver

Vancouver, British Columbia
April 9, 1990

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UNIVERSITIES IN THE REAL WORLD*

I was delighted with the invitation to be your speaker today, for two main reasons. First, as a native British Columbian, I get periodic west coast attacks that are very much like Big Mac attacks: I simply have to get out here and breathe the Pacific air every few months or I get these deprivation symptoms that cause me to behave in ways that aren't very dignified, and your invitation gave me an additional excuse to satisfy those urgings at a time when the extended winter of Ottawa was starting to take its toll on my equilibrium. Secondly, I have some familiarity with the Canadian Club and I admire its commitment to improving our understanding of the country in the interest of moving it forward; God knows at this particular time we need all of the understanding we can get if we're going to keep the place from falling apart. I am flattered to be here because your Club has a history of inviting prominent and controversial speakers from virtually all walks of life to address this distinguished forum, and that indicates that your minds are certainly open to whatever perspectives may prove constructive.

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*The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance, in preparing this presentation, of Mark Giberson, Manager of Media and Community Relations, Carleton University.

That openness to new ideas, to untried solutions, to innovations and approaches that are even a bit risky, is something we have in common. Openness is the stock and trade of universities the world over and, with that in mind, I'd like you to think of my talk as a contribution to dialogue rather than as a discourse. By inviting me here, you've shown that you are interested in the university's perspective. Please know that we in the universities are interested in yours as well.

I'm going to speak to you today about leadership -- in particular, the leadership role of our universities in advancing Canada's economic development, international competitiveness, social justice and the quality of life, both at home and abroad -- in other words, about how we relate to the real world. I chose that topic because I felt that leadership in the real world would be something that each of you would be familiar with. Most of you are leaders in your own right, and you know that in order to be an effective leader you need to have a pretty clear idea about what you stand for, where you want to go, and how to get there.

I could have spoken with you about other things, of course. I could have talked at length about the financial hardships universities face in trying to meet the ever-increasing demands for educational opportunities and research with operating

grants that fall well short of the inflation rate we experience. But I suspect that my friends, Bill Saywell at Simon Fraser and David Strangway at U.B.C., have already done that and there's no need for me to drum it in any further.

I could have spoken about the problem of maintaining the quality of our academic programs while trying to ensure that people who have the ability and the desire to learn at the university level have an opportunity to do so. But that might lead you to conclude that we have to either close our doors to your children and grandchildren or flush our academic standards down the toilet, and I'm not ready to give up on either just yet.

I could have spent this time defending professorial tenure, sabbatical leave, and the absolute necessity of maintaining academic freedom. But that might engage us in a philosophical debate that we don't have time for today, even though I'm sure I'd win it eventually.

I could have complained that universities are misunderstood, that the public doesn't really know what we're about and perhaps doesn't really care. But if that's true then I want to tackle it in a more constructive way, because complaining about it would probably only make things worse for us.

I could have chosen any of these topics because, ladies and gentlemen, they are all legitimate concerns. Our financial problems are real. Universities right across the country are in desperate need of a healthy infusion of funds and there is a rising crisis in Canadian higher education. Just what kind of crisis are we talking about? At the University of Manitoba, undergraduate students are working with 30- and 40-year-old microscopes. York University's annual library acquisitions have dropped by 24 per cent in the last decade. Most of our major universities now have dozens of classes with more than 300 students in them. For the last two years, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council has received 800 funding applications from new researchers only to turn down nearly half of them because it didn't have sufficient research dollars to support all the studies that should be done. And all of these things are happening in the information age, where we put a premium on knowledge and the use of state-of-the-art technology.

Our problems are serious and, what's more, in the long run our problems are <u>your</u> problems. You've been hearing about the plight of Canada's universities for more than a decade now and you have to be tempted to think that the university community has cried "wolf" once too often. Let me assure you that we're in jeopardy of cheating a lot of our young people out of their future and of losing a substantial portion of what we've invested

in higher education -- all in the name of short-term financial expediency. Cutting back on higher education and research funding is a false economy, ladies and gentlemen, and we desperately need your help to turn things around.

But that's a topic for another time because, despite all the problems they face, Canadian universities are fundamentally winners rather than whiners. They've shown that they can seize opportunities and meet new challenges. They've proven themselves to be innovative and adaptable. They know what they stand for and they have a vision of a preferred future. They know how to form partnerships. They produce leaders -- they are leaders -- and that's something we can all be proud of.

What is it that universities stand for? First and foremost, we believe that people have the right to seek truth, to pursue knowledge in all fields and to share that knowledge with others, to challenge social conventions and to do so without threat of censorship or political constraint. That's why academic freedom and tenure -- which is <u>not</u> unconditional job security I might add -- are and must always be part of our corporate culture. Over their 800-year history, universities have developed a system of peer review which has proven to be a pretty effective means of dealing with charlatans. We require that our faculty do research and publish their findings. The

peer review process is something akin to the ordeal that the Biblical Daniel went through in the lions' den. Academics have fangs and they take a certain amount of relish in sharpening them on colleagues they perceive to be dull-witted or intellectually lazy or dishonest. It's not always a pretty sight, but it works.

I realize that there is something like this in the corporate world. But the corporate world has different, quantitative measures of value -- like utility, market share, or profits. You can't use that kind of measurement when you're dealing with ideas or knowledge, because there you can't always judge what is useful. What's more important to the university is whether or not it is truthful.

Despite this fundamental difference in values, there are those who would argue that universities should become more business-like. I believe that there's a good deal of common ground between business and the academy, but I don't believe universities can adopt business culture holus bolus and still be universities. I don't think anyone here would suggest that a church should start selling indulgences to improve its balance sheet, but that is no more far-fetched than suggesting that universities should divest themselves of academic freedom and tenure in order to become more efficient.

Universities also believe that an educated citizenry is the life-blood of a democratic society and that higher education, in and of itself, is of value to individuals and to the society in which they live. In that belief, Canadian universities have accommodated tremendous increases in enrolment -- 37.9 per cent in the last decade alone.

Those increases cannot be attributed to growth in the traditional 18- to 24-year-old age cohort -- their numbers have actually been declining. Rather, we see university enrolments now that are not only much larger than they were a generation ago, but that are far more diverse as well. There have been dramatic increases in the number of women attending university -- in the last 20 years their numbers have nearly tripled. There are far more students over the age of 21 -- these people now account for nearly a third of all full-time students. There are more students from visible minorities. There are more students who have physical disabilities. And there are more people studying part time -- more than three times as many as in 1969.

Changes in the university student body have meant changes in the way we go about our business. For example, we're offering a lot more evening courses in order to accommodate the needs of students who hold down full-time jobs. Carleton is just one of several universit s that offer courses via television

that reach students who, for any number of reasons, find it difficult or impossible to get to campus. Your Open University endeavours to meet similar needs here in B.C. We've made our buildings accessible to students who are physically disabled -- and here again, I'm pleased to say that this is an area where Carleton has shown national leadership, as has St. Mary's University in Halifax. And we've recognized our responsibility to provide special programs to visible minorities -- especially Native Canadians. St. Thomas University in Fredericton offers a Bachelor of Social Work program that's geared to Native students. The University of New Brunswick has a similar program in education to train Native teachers, and The University of Regina has a program to prepare Native Canadians for careers in journalism. The University of Saskatchewan does it in law and The University of Manitoba in medicine -- just to mention a few of the dozens of initiatives across the country. We even try to help rehabilitate prisoners in our penitentiaries through the efforts of such institutions as Queen's University in Kingston, Simon Fraser University here, and The University of Winnipeg.

We believe that an educated mind should have an appreciation for how knowledge is pursued in several disciplines -- not just one. The research methods of the historian or the economist are different from those of the chemist or the aeronautical engineer. We seek to introduce students not merely

to subject matter and the content of this course or that, but to the process of learning, to the process of discovery, so they can go on learning for the rest of their lives and so they can be intellectually flexible enough to change careers as most of them will have to do several times before they retire. We've recognized that today's students have legitimate concerns about job prospects and the real world, and we've responded with some remarkable adjustments in our courses of study and our methods of instruction.

A generation ago, universities in Canada, for the most part, were small, undergraduate institutions that taught courses in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. We've come a long way since the '50s. In those days you'd be hard-pressed to find programs in biotechnology and genetic engineering, computer-aided manufacturing, environmental management and assessment, international business, and tourism and recreation -- but you can find them now, and you can find them here in Canada -- often right up to the doctoral level. And we no longer have to import legions of foreign professors because we can now do a first-rate job of producing our own.

In the 1950's there weren't the co-operative education programs we have today where students combine classroom learning with on-the-job experience; the University of Waterloo is an

international leader in this field and the University of Victoria isn't far behind. There weren't the interdisciplinary programs we have today -- and this, again, is an area where Carleton has shown world-wide leadership; our students can now do a combined major in technology, society and the environment, for example, and they can tailor their own programs to meet their personal needs or career interests.

We've made remarkable progress in maximizing our resources. We have a sterling example of institutional collaboration in the nation's capital, where we have two of Canada's major universities: Carleton University and the University of Ottawa now offer all of their graduate programs in science and engineering jointly; we have a joint graduate degree program in economics as well, and our students are able to go back and forth taking courses from both universities without any financial transactions or administrative obstacles. And in Quebec, Concordia University, the Université du Québec à Montréal, Université Laval and the Université de Montréal have recently teamed up to offer a joint doctoral program in art history -- the fourth joint graduate degree program to be offered by a consortium of institutions in that province.

We still believe that the primary purpose of scholarship and research is the pursuit of truth and that the

search for knowledge must not be limited by concerns about utility alone. But we recognize that much of what we discover has the potential to be applied by others for the benefit of the wider community. What's more, we recognize that we have a responsibility to help facilitate that transfer of knowledge from the research lab to the marketplace.

Where I come from, Carleton, the University of Ottawa, Algonquin College and the Université du Québec à Hull have linked up with local industry in the Ottawa-Carleton Research Institute, which has spawned numerous joint ventures, research partnerships, technology transfer, and personnel exchanges between the private sector and educational institutions. The Telecommunications Research Institute of Ontario is another consortium which sees Carleton, the University of Ottawa, Queen's, and McMaster undertaking co-operative research and development in the field of telecommunications -- an extremely powerful centre of excellence that is competitive with the best in the world. Next door in Montreal, a consortium of universities, businesses, and governments has recently announced the creation of a research park that will operate from two campuses -- one in Saint-Laurent and the other about five minutes from downtown -- another world-class R&D resource right here in Canada. At the Université du Québec à Montréal an agreement has been signed with a private firm to market a software program that assists with building

maintenance. At Simon Fraser University here in B.C., physicists have developed a computerized apple sorter that spots bad apples and is likely to save fruit growers millions in spoilage costs. Apples also figure in a joint venture involving the Technical University of Nova Scotia, where the apple in question is Apple Canada -- the computer people; that University and Apple are working on a new way to teach computer science and math to Nova Scotia high school students. Also on the east coast the Corporate-University Partnership Program is teaming up university expertise with the needs of Atlantic-area businesses. And researchers at the University of Waterloo have developed a sewage disposal system that could double the capacity of municipal sewage treatment plants.

In order to get their discoveries into the market where they can begin generating private-sector wealth, a lot of universities -- and certainly Carleton is among them -- have hired commercial development officers to match our expertise with the resources and talents of the private sector. Universities and business are learning to talk with one another and they're learning to work together -- often in partnership with government. I think that's encouraging and I think we're going to see a lot more of it.

Universities have shown their leadership qualities when it comes to contemporary problems and concerns, too. We're no strangers to issues like energy conservation, the environment, physical fitness, and disarmament. Tune in to a public affairs program on the radio or television or pick up a daily newspaper or magazine and chances are you'll find scores of university professors being asked to comment on this issue or that -- answering questions, offering advice, clarifying problems, putting forth solutions.

And we've applied our in-house expertise to solve our own problems. Carleton's ground water heating and cooling system is a case in point. It involves sinking shafts a couple of hundred metres into the ground where there are large bodies of water under our campus at a constant temperature of nine degrees centigrade, pumping it up in the winter and extracting the heat from the water to warm our buildings and then pumping it back down underground to maintain the ecological balance; in the summer the process is reversed in order to cool our buildings. This new system is not only environmentally sound; it will save us millions in energy costs -- thanks to work done in our own physical plant and earth sciences departments.

At the risk of sounding immodest, I think you'll find that universities are pretty enlightened employers, too. Long

before business and industry or even governments began to get serious about issues like sexual harassment, pay equity, AIDS, and education leave, there were policies on these matters at universities. Women continue to be under-represented among university administrators, but we're doing something about that too; for example, forty per cent of the Deans at Carleton are now women. And many Canadian universities, including the main ones here in B.C., have now established employment equity targets not only for women but for Natives, visible minorities, and the physically disabled as well, thereby demonstrating the leadership that we should all expect from our institutions of higher education.

The same kind of knowledge that's being applied to problems here at home is finding application overseas too. Our links to the world beyond our borders are substantial. Carleton, for instance, has more than 50 international linkage agreements at last count, many of which are with Third World countries, and our students this year come from some 90 foreign nations as well as from every corner of Canada. We're truly trans-national and we're multi-national, as is true of the University of British Columbia as well. And when the people we educate return home, they go back as ambassadors for Canada. For an exporting nation like ours, having friends in the board rooms and legislatures of

the world is like having money in the bank. Sharing our expertise with others is in our own self-interest.

Well, my time is running out but I hope I've given you a sense of where we've come from and what we've been doing. If you read the popular press, you might have gained the impression that universities had atrophied -- that our financial problems have been so all-consuming that we have long since given up the idea of growth and development and world-class excellence. Well, not so! Nor is it the case that we're out of touch with the real world; the best of us are large, complex, multi-national corporations, moderately-sized cities in fact, with thousands of employees, tens of thousands of clients, and annual budgets in the hundreds of millions. We are not only in the real world, but we are also of it, interacting constantly with it and shaping very directly what its future will be. Leadership in the real world is what we're all about, and I consider it a real privilege to have a chance to try and run such an operation.

There aren't many communities in this country that have the benefit of a university at their doorstep. This city, like Ottawa, has two of them and together they probably contribute something in the neighbourhood of three-quarters of a billion dollars to your local economy each year -- money that wouldn't be here if your universities weren't. Universities enrich our lives

by providing cultural programming, sporting events, learning opportunities, libraries, clinics, consulting and countless other services that we would not enjoy if these institutions of higher education weren't here. Their campuses help to beautify our cities. They draw in a tremendous range of talent. And the young people they attract to our communities invigorate our neighbourhoods -- admittedly sometimes to extremes, but youthful enthusiasm is something people our age have always looked upon as a mixed blessing. Universities enrich the lives of us all, and especially those in the communities where they're located; people like to live and work in centres where institutions of higher learning can be found.

I guess my bottom line is that our communities and our country would be lacklustre if it weren't for vibrant, healthy universities. We have a vision for ourselves and we have a vision for this country, and we're doing our best to realize those visions with the resources that are available to us. If we can get more, we'll be able to do it better and faster; that's what we need as a nation and that's what we must all strive for. But we'll make the most of whatever we have and we'll do our best along with you to move this country forward.

To be perfectly frank, I think you're lucky to have us here. We need one another and we can help one another a lot. That's how I see it. I hope that's how you see it, too.